



U.S. Department of Agriculture

Strategic Plan Fiscal Years 2022-2026





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A Message from the Secretary



It's an honor to be back at USDA, particularly at this moment in our history when we face such urgent needs and challenges in rural and Tribal communities, and across America.

I am proud of how USDA has stepped up and worked tirelessly to deliver core programs

and critical American Rescue Plan (ARP) COVID-19 pandemic assistance to reduce hunger across the country, strengthen the food supply chain, invest in rural America, and provide long awaited support to underserved, socially disadvantaged farmers. In a major step to implement ARP, we have launched an independent Equity Commission charged with providing recommendations on policies, programs and actions needed to advance equity at USDA.

USDA's FY 2022 – 2026 Strategic Plan reflects the challenges and opportunities we face and outlines how we plan to meet this moment. It is guided by five cross-cutting priorities that inform our work: addressing climate change via climate-smart agriculture, forestry, and renewable energy; advancing racial justice, equity, and opportunity; creating more and better markets for producers and consumers at home and abroad; tackling food and nutrition security while maintaining a safe food supply; and making USDA a great place to work for everyone.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act signed into law by President Biden on November 15, 2021, is a transformative, historic investment and opportunity to improve life and livelihoods across America – from delivering 21st century broadband to farmers, ranchers, small businesses, and rural communities for access to markets, jobs, telemedicine, and distance learning; to increasing community resiliency to climate change, drought, and wildfire risks; to providing innovative solutions that will strengthen American farmers, ranchers, foresters, producers, and rural communities.

Together we will work to ensure that The People's Department is effective, efficient, transparent, and customer-friendly as it delivers transformational investments and works to achieve six strategic goals:

- Investments in climate-smart agriculture, forestry, and renewable energy will reduce emissions and create new and better market opportunities for all producers.
- Historically underserved communities will have improved access to USDA programs and opportunities as the Department roots out generations of systemic racism and discrimination.
- New tools, funding, and research will help a diverse array of producers and landowners adopt conservation practices and access new products and markets.
- All Americans will benefit from investments that provide consistent access to safe, healthy, affordable food essential to optimal health and well-being and address food and nutrition security.
- Rural and tribal communities will benefit from historic investments in broadband, clean water, and clean and renewable energy infrastructure that will foster new job and market opportunities
- The USDA workforce will be strong, healthy, and inclusive, comprised of leaders and staff who work together to build a culture that welcomes, respects, and supports everyone to reach their highest potential.

We know that with bold action, collaborative leadership, active dialogue, and a deep commitment to serving all Americans, we can together maximize impact to achieve extraordinary results. I look forward to working with you all.

Sincerely,

Tom Vilsack
Secretary

About the U.S. Department of Agriculture

On May 15, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed legislation to establish the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA or the Department). Two and a half years later in his final message to Congress, Lincoln called USDA “The People’s Department.” At that time, about half of all Americans lived on farms, compared with about two percent today. But through our work on food, agriculture, economic development, science, natural resource conservation, and a host of other issues, USDA continues to fulfill Lincoln’s vision—serving millions of Americans every day. The agriculture and food industry contributes \$1.1 trillion to the U.S. domestic product and represents nearly 11% of total U.S. employment. Furthermore, USDA over the years has gained more authorities to expand its support not only in agriculture but the support infrastructure that give all producers better access to market and its surrounding communities and natural resources to also thrive.

Today, USDA is comprised of 29 agencies organized under eight Mission Areas and 16 Staff Offices, with nearly 100,000 employees serving the American people at more than 6,000 locations across the country and abroad.

Mission, Vision, and Core Values

USDA Mission

To serve all Americans by providing effective, innovative, science-based public policy leadership in agriculture, food and nutrition, natural resource protection and management, rural development, and related issues with a commitment to deliverable equitable and climate-smart opportunities that inspire and help America thrive.

USDA Vision

An equitable and climate-smart food and agriculture economy that protects and improves the health, nutrition, and quality of life of all Americans; yields healthy land, forests, and clean water; helps rural America thrive; and feeds the world.

USDA Core Values

Respect and Dignity: We treat all people with courtesy and respect, and we value the inherent dignity of every individual.

Equity and Inclusion: We seek to end discrimination in all forms, wherever it exists, and expand services and opportunities to underserved people and communities across America, starting with our workforce.

Trust and Integrity: We act in a manner that is deserving of the public’s trust and with the utmost integrity in everything we do as public servants.

Service and Results: We listen to our internal and external customers and actively incorporate their ideas on how to best reach our diverse customers and deliver service that significantly and positively impacts the lives of all Americans.

Science Leadership: We base our decisions and policy on science and data that are reliable, timely, relevant and free from political interference.

Stakeholder Engagement

USDA regularly consults and engages with a wide range of diverse stakeholders, including Congress; USDA’s customers; State, local, and Tribal governments producers, cooperatives, landowners, policy experts, universities and trade schools, infrastructure sectors, lenders, foundations, technical assistance providers, environmental and social advocates, industry partners, and consumer groups regarding our programs’ effectiveness. USDA’s Mission Areas and Agencies conduct a variety of stakeholder engagement activities, including posting Requests for Information on the Federal Register and holding listening sessions with different Departmental partners. These activities have been used to inform and validate the strategic goals, objectives, and performance measures outlined in the plan.

Cross-Cutting Themes

To meet the challenges and opportunities before us, Mission Areas and Agencies will work to advance the following cross-cutting themes and strategic priorities and ensure that critical mission-enabling operational systems—from science, research, technology, and data, to contracting and procurement—are strengthened to maximize USDA’s ability to deliver programs and customer service responsibly and equitably.

- *Addressing Climate Change via Climate-Smart Agriculture, Forestry, and Renewable Energy:* USDA

can position the agriculture and forestry sectors and rural and Tribal communities to be climate leaders. Acting on this will require investments in the research and development of climate-smart solutions that improve soil and forest health, make production more profitable, resilient, and adaptable while creating new income opportunities and generational wealth and contributing to National greenhouse gas emission reduction goals. This plan outlines our strategies to integrate climate change risks and opportunities into programs and services as we support farmers, ranchers, forest landowners, partners, and rural and Tribal communities in tackling this challenge.

- *Advancing Racial Justice, Equity, and Opportunity:* USDA is committed to equity, civil rights, and inclusion, rooted in our dedication to justice and equal opportunity for our employees and those we serve. USDA is taking bold, historic action to reduce barriers to access, advance opportunity for underserved communities, and root out generations of systemic racism and discrimination. This includes the creation of the Equity Commission whose responsibility is to assess and recommend actionable solutions that will advance equity at USDA and its programs. It also includes embracing diversity, equity, inclusion, and access in the workplace and ensuring USDA is a great place to work with a well-trained and diverse workforce committed to all its customers. This plan integrates equity in all its goals and will be executed into decision-making, operations, program delivery, and services with underserved communities in mind to ensure that all of USDA's customers have a fair shot at program access and economic opportunity.
- *Creating More and Better Markets for Producers and Consumers at Home and Abroad:* The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed vulnerabilities in our food system. As we build back better, we must create new and better markets for all producers and consumers. The food system of the future needs to be fair, competitive, distributed, and resilient. The success of American agriculture hinges on research, innovation, and the development of new markets, both at home and abroad. This plan

outlines our strategies to create new markets and improve existing ones.

- *Tackling Food and Nutrition Insecurity and Food Safety:* Recognizing that food and health are inherently intertwined, USDA aims to ensure Americans have consistent access to the safe, healthy, affordable food essential to optimal health and well-being. This means keeping the food supply safe—as USDA does each day—as well as prioritizing nutrition security. USDA's nutrition programs are the most far-reaching tools available to achieve these objectives. This plan lays out our strategies to build on the innovation required by our COVID-19 response and other bold solutions that enhance food safety, improve our nutrition programs, reduce food insecurity, and prioritize nutrition security.
- *Making USDA a Great Place to Work for Everyone:* We strive to ensure an exceptional work environment as we contain the COVID-19 pandemic and work across the Department to build back better. This requires a strong, healthy, and inclusive workforce—one with leaders and staff working together to build a welcoming, respectful, accountable, and supportive culture that empowers everyone to reach their highest potential. This plan lays out our strategies to make USDA an employer of choice and great place for everyone to work.

The graphic on the following page provides a thematic crosswalk between these overarching themes and the strategic goals and objectives by Mission Area.



Addressing Climate Change via Climate Smart Agriculture, Forestry, and Renewable Energy



Advancing Racial Justice, Equity & Opportunity



Creating More & Better Market Opportunities for Producers and Consumers at Home and Abroad



Tackling Food & Nutrition Insecurity While Maintaining a Safe Food Supply



Making USDA a Great Place to Work for Everyone

							
GOAL 1	1.1	Use Climate-Smart Management and Sound Science to Enhance the Health and Productivity of Agricultural Lands	★				
	1.2	Lead Efforts to Adapt to the Consequences of Climate Change in Agriculture and Forestry	★				
	1.3	Restore, Protect, and Conserve Watersheds to Ensure Clean, Abundant, and Continuous Provision of Water Resources	★				
	1.4	Increase Carbon Sequestration, Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions, and Create Economic Opportunities (and Develop Low-Carbon Energy Solutions)	★				
GOAL 2	2.1	Protect Agricultural Health by Minimizing Major Diseases, Pests, and Wildlife Conflicts			★		
	2.2	Build Resilient Food Systems, Infrastructure, and Supply Chain			★		
	2.3	Foster Agricultural Innovation			★		
GOAL 3	3.1	Foster Sustainable Economic Growth by Promoting Innovation, Building Resilience to Climate Change, and Expanding Renewable Energy	★	★			
	3.2	Expand Markets for Emerging Technologies, Sustainable Products, and Novel Products			★		
	3.3	Expand All Producers' Access to Global Markets Through Negotiation and Enforcement of Trade Agreements		★	★		
	3.4	Expand International Marketing Opportunities and Build Demand in Developing Countries through Delivery of Technical Assistance and Capacity Building			★		
GOAL 4	4.1	Increase Food Security Through Assistance and Access to Nutritious and Affordable Food		★		★	
	4.2	Encourage Healthy Dietary Choices through Data-Driven, Flexible, Customer-Focused Approaches				★	
	4.3	Prevent Foodborne Illness and Protect Public Health				★	
GOAL 5	5.1	Improve Rural and Tribal Community Infrastructure, Including Affordable E-Connectivity, Cornerstone Community Facilities, Sustainable and Reliable Power, and Clean and Safe Water and Sewer Systems		★			
	5.2	Boost the Financial Security of Rural and Tribal Communities Through Access to Affordable Housing			★		
	5.3	Increase Capacity, Sustainability, and Economic Vitality in Rural and Tribal Communities		★	★		
	5.4	Promote Environmental Justice by Maximizing Sustainable and Green Economic Development in Rural and Tribal Communities	★	★	★		
GOAL 6	6.1	Foster a Culture of Civil Rights, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility, Transparency, and Accountability		★			★
	6.2	Establish a Customer-Centric, Inclusive, High-Performing Workforce that is Representative of America and the Communities We Serve					★
	6.3	Promote USDA Operational Excellence Through Better Use of Technology and Shared Solutions					★



Strategic Goal 1

Combat Climate Change to Support America's Working Lands, Natural Resources, and Communities

Climate change poses a significant risk to agriculture, forests, and grasslands across the United States and the communities that support and depend on them. Now is the time to act. Our agricultural lands, National forests, and private working lands require conservation and restoration efforts to strengthen their resilience to drought, invasive species, and wildfire. The Department must lead with investments in science, research, and climate-smart solutions. These investments will mitigate the impacts of climate change, increase adaptation to climate change, generate new income opportunities, and build generational wealth in disadvantaged communities.

Agriculture can lead the fight on climate using climate-smart agriculture, forestry, and renewable energy practices that sequester carbon, reduce emissions, improve adaptation, and increase market opportunities for all producers. USDA is working to develop and implement a comprehensive climate-smart strategy that is centered on voluntary incentives and meeting the needs of our diverse producers, landowners, and communities. Our approach includes significant investments in resources for all producers and landowners. Additionally, it provides a host of new tools to deploy important conservation practices and the research essential to inform them.

USDA's priorities to help all producers, landowners, partners, and rural and Tribal communities tackle climate change include:

- *Mitigation*: Support meeting the President's target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions economy-wide by 50 to 52% by 2030.
- *Adaptation*: Implement climate adaptation plans to ensure preparedness of USDA and its stakeholders for the current and projected impacts of climate change.
- *Equity and Environmental Justice*: Contribute to the Justice40 Initiative to benefit communities

Learning Agenda Alignment

The USDA Learning Agenda contains one priority question aligned to this strategic goal from the Farm Production and Conservation Mission Area:

What conservation practices are most effective in delivering climate benefits?

disproportionately impacted by climate change and strengthen commitment to environmental justice. Justice40 is a whole-of-government effort to ensure that Federal agencies work with States and local communities to make good on President Biden's promise to deliver at least 40% of the overall benefits from Federal investments in climate and clean energy to disadvantaged communities.

- *Research and Development*: Focus climate research and development efforts to better understand the full range of potential climate impacts, accelerate development of science-based solutions, inform the deployment of adaptation and mitigation strategies, and remove barriers to access. Agencies are encouraged to leverage the USDA Climate Hubs as a framework to support the delivery of climate change mitigation and adaptation science, technology, and tools.

Objective 1.1

Use Climate-Smart Management and Sound Science to Enhance the Health and Productivity of Agricultural Lands

Objective Leaders: Office of the Chief Scientist – Research, Education, and Economics; Farm Production and Conservation – Natural Resources Conservation Service; Natural Resources and Environment – Forest Service; Office of the Chief Economist

USDA is developing and implementing a comprehensive strategy to incentivize climate-smart decision-making by all agricultural and forest producers, landowners, and communities. The Department will build on its progress to integrate climate change adaptation and mitigation into programs and services as we work to support farmers; ranchers; forest landowners; partners; and urban, rural, and Tribal communities in tackling climate change. By increasing the sustainability of our forests, rangelands, and crop and livestock systems through the deployment of climate-smart and environmentally smart management, we will see improvements in the condition of these resources, the development of healthy ecosystems, and vibrant, resilient communities.

Implementation Strategies

USDA will achieve this objective through the following implementation strategies, with an emphasis on building evidence to inform decision-making:

- Implement a Soil Health Monitoring Network to improve our understanding of soil management impacts on carbon sequestration.
- Improve conservation practice tracking and reporting to better inform conservation deployment strategies and report on progress, including through the Conservation Effects Assessment Program and other assessments.
- Establish the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) Climate Change Center of Excellence to develop standardized research protocols for innovative climate-smart technologies and practices.
- Establish the Greenhouse Gas Inventory and Assessment Program to improve USDA's reporting

Spotlight on Science

USDA is using remote sensing and geospatial tools to improve near real-time monitoring of soil moisture, soil carbon flux, potential yield, and pest and disease outbreaks to better inform its observational networks and advise climate-smart decision-making.

on greenhouse gas emissions and carbon sequestration.

- Implement the 10-Year Wildfire Crisis Strategy to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire to communities. This strategy will dramatically increase the scale of fuels and forest health treatments, especially in areas of high risk. This strategy calls for treating up to 20 million additional acres of National Forest System Lands over the coming decade, along with up to 30 million additional acres on adjoining lands of multiple ownerships, while building a long-term maintenance plan.
- Leverage the ongoing work by the Forest Service's Research and Development (R&D) arm to identify data needed to measure and index fire risk, risk reduction, and resilience in fireheds and to inform prioritized investing in risk reduction and firehed resilience.
- Conduct an analysis of timber removals and their consequential impacts on the forests and economies of various regions. The findings of this study will be used to site mills, estimate sustainability of supply chains and forests, and inform policy and decision-making.
- Perform an assessment of alternative woody biomass harvesting scenarios to inform investment and resource treatment decisions.
- Assess the extent to which U.S. forests are sustainable in ecological, social, and economic dimensions and benchmark this data to other Nations.
- Conduct a Nationwide statistical survey of individual forest owners to determine how the Forest Service can improve collaboration and

ensure equitable treatment of underrepresented owners.

- Through cooperative agreements between the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) Transportation Services Division and university partners, review and analyze information on climate-related disruptions to transportation networks across various modes (e.g., ocean, rail, trucking, etc.).
- Link rural, Tribal, and urban community resource concerns and focus resources on the most critical areas of need to maximize conservation impact and allow all producers to be natural resource stewards. USDA is developing data layers that enable us to view communities in the context of climate change impacts, i.e., areas of severe drought, floods, wildfires, etc., or areas with mitigation opportunities. The data will be used to target funding where it has the greatest impact. Additionally, we are investigating how we can use indigenous knowledge to determine effective approaches to address extreme weather and climate events.
- Invest in long-term climate change research, education, and extension through the Agriculture Research Service's Long-Term Agroecosystem Research Network and the USDA Climate Hubs to advance innovation on new crop and soil management systems, environmental monitoring, and breeding.
- Address increased pest resilience due to climate change, including developing climate suitability maps for priority pests, and focus pest surveillance activities using risk-based approaches and data analytics to proactively safeguard against potential pest risks resulting from climate change.
- Support research and programmatic advancements that aim to understand and identify forward-thinking strategies for ensuring pollinator resiliency in the face of heightened climate-induced stressors and forage declines. Establish a new pollinator subcommittee within the [National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board](#).

Objective 1.2

Lead Efforts to Adapt to the Consequences of Climate Change in Agriculture and Forestry

Objective Leaders: Office of the Chief Economist; Farm Production and Conservation; Natural Resources and Environment; Research, Education and Economics

All farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners are on the front lines of climate change, facing changes in temperature and precipitation patterns and more frequent and intense events such as floods, drought, hurricanes, and wildfires. More than ever, their planning efforts and decision-making need to account for the impacts of climate change. Climate adaptation on the part of USDA will ensure that climate change thinking is integrated throughout USDA's mission, programs, operations, and management. USDA will continue to be a leader in the delivery of climate-smart science, research, and conservation practices, including through the USDA [Climate Hubs](#).

USDA manages about 20% of the Nation's forests and nearly 10% of the Nation's rangelands. These forests and grasslands are essential to the environmental, economic, and social well-being of the country. However, these lands are suffering increasingly adverse impacts from severe wildfires, insect and disease infestations, human influences, and extreme weather events, inhibiting their ability to provide and sustain critical natural resources and recreation opportunities for the public. USDA's ongoing objective is to improve forest and grassland conditions to make them more resilient to extreme events; share stewardship responsibilities with neighboring private landowners, Tribes, and governments; be responsive to public needs; and ensure

Spotlight on Science

USDA Climate Hubs conduct regional climate vulnerability assessments using the latest National Climate Assessment data. These assessments will provide regionally customized climate mitigation and adaptation strategies for working land managers to make climate-smart decisions.

they are sustainable, healthy, and productive so future generations can continue to use and enjoy them.

Implementation Strategies

USDA will achieve this objective through the following implementation strategies, with an emphasis on building evidence to inform decision-making:

- Build long-term resilience at the farm and forest scale through investments in science-based adaptation practices that foster soil and forest health.
- Strengthen disaster preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery through increased investment in outreach and technical assistance, preparation and response guides, and rapid response.
- Build a safety net that helps producers both mitigate and respond to the impacts of climate change.
- Expand access to tools and technology for climate adaptation and enhance outreach and education to build adaptive capacity.
- Determine factors that influence management decisions on wildfire suppression operations by conducting in-person field testing and record reviews.
- Establish measures to determine whether current funding allocation is the most effective use of program resources for [Forest Stewardship Management Plans](#). Track implementation of recommendations from Forest Stewardship Management Plans to better understand conservation outcomes of the program.
- Identify priorities for hazardous fuel treatments to maximize outcomes of fuel management efforts.
- Support urban, rural, and Tribal communities in implementing sustainable and climate-smart strategies that improve resilience.
- Quantify the number of climate adaptation and migration assessments, tools, and stakeholders supported through the USDA Climate Hubs to better understand vulnerabilities and improve adaptation strategies for resilience and relevancy.
- Research innovative tools, technologies, and management strategies that quantify adoption benefits and strengthen mitigation, adaptation, and resiliency of production landscapes.



Objective 1.3

Restore, Protect, and Conserve Watersheds to Ensure Clean, Abundant, and Continuous Provision of Water Resources

Objective Leaders: Forest Service; Natural Resources Conservation Service; Farm Service Agency

The Nation's forests and grasslands that provide clean and available water are a fundamental part of the American landscape and legacy that the Forest Service holds in trust for future and present generations. These lands, along with the millions of acres of well-managed, privately held forests and grasslands, provide clean air and water, forest and rangeland products, mineral and energy resources, jobs, and quality habitat for fish and wildlife. Productive agricultural landscapes, including clean and available water, healthy wetlands, streams and rivers, and abundant fish and wildlife, underlie robust tourism and recreational activities.

Implementation Strategies

USDA will achieve this objective through the following implementation strategies, with an emphasis on building evidence to inform decision-making:

- Perform [Resources Planning Act Assessments](#) to determine the impact of climate change on natural resources. Findings of these assessments will be used to advise on legislation and inform policy decisions.
- Conduct a Nationwide statistical survey of forest area and forest characteristics to determine the extent to which Forest Service programs are effectively sustaining the health, diversity, and productivity of forests and grasslands.
- Conduct an analysis of alternative strategies for discretionary National program decision-making associated with Farm Service Agency's (FSA) Conservation Reserve Program and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation programs, including: the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#),

[Agricultural Conservation Easement Program](#), [Conservation Stewardship Program](#), and [Regional Conservation Partnership Program](#), to increase accessibility and effectiveness.

- Improve the ability to measure the effectiveness of CRP in reducing the flow of soil particles and trapping nutrients in place, specifically, to estimate the water quality impacts of Clean Lakes, Estuaries, and Rivers (CLEAR) practices, including grassed waterways and restored wetlands, FSA is working with partners to have the capability in the next year to report a total value related to nutrient and sediment reduction for CLEAR practices.
- Continue conservation data tracking and analysis, including impact on soil loss reduction on cropland, to better understand FSA and NRCS program use and dynamics and identify areas for additional outreach and public affairs engagement.

Spotlight on Science

USDA will support the water cycle by conducting research and accelerating understanding of Regenerative Agriculture. By studying the key hinderances to scaling up Regenerative Agriculture practices, USDA can convey its situational utility, implementation process, and use of tools and technologies to protect water resources and working landscapes.

Objective 1.4

Increase Carbon Sequestration, Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions, and Create Economic Opportunities (and Develop Low-Carbon Energy Solutions).

Objective Leaders: Rural Development; Natural Resources Conservation Service; Farm Service Agency; Farm Production and Conservation; Office of the Chief Economist; Research, Education and Economics

The Biden-Harris Administration has called for a whole-of-government approach to achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, and USDA has a critical role to play to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. The Department will leverage its partnerships with agriculture, forestry, rural communities, Tribes, cooperatives, and businesses to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in agriculture, sequester forest carbon, decarbonize rural electricity, and invest in renewable fuels production and renewable electricity generation. Based on the best available science and strategies, increasing carbon sequestration and reducing greenhouse gas emissions will contribute to a lower National emissions footprint. USDA will continue to analyze the economic costs and benefits of these conservation practices during implementation.

Implementation Strategies

USDA will achieve this objective through the following implementation strategies, with an emphasis on building evidence to inform decision-making:

- Implement the Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry Partnership Program to create new market opportunities for climate-smart commodities produced by farmers, ranchers, and forest owners and offer a mechanism to build a stable platform for climate action in the agriculture and forestry sectors.
- Finalize and implement the 10-year National Reforestation Strategy to provide a vision and framework to address the Nation's reforestation needs.
- Develop a Fire Risk Reduction Strategy for reducing wildfire risk to rural, Tribal, and urban

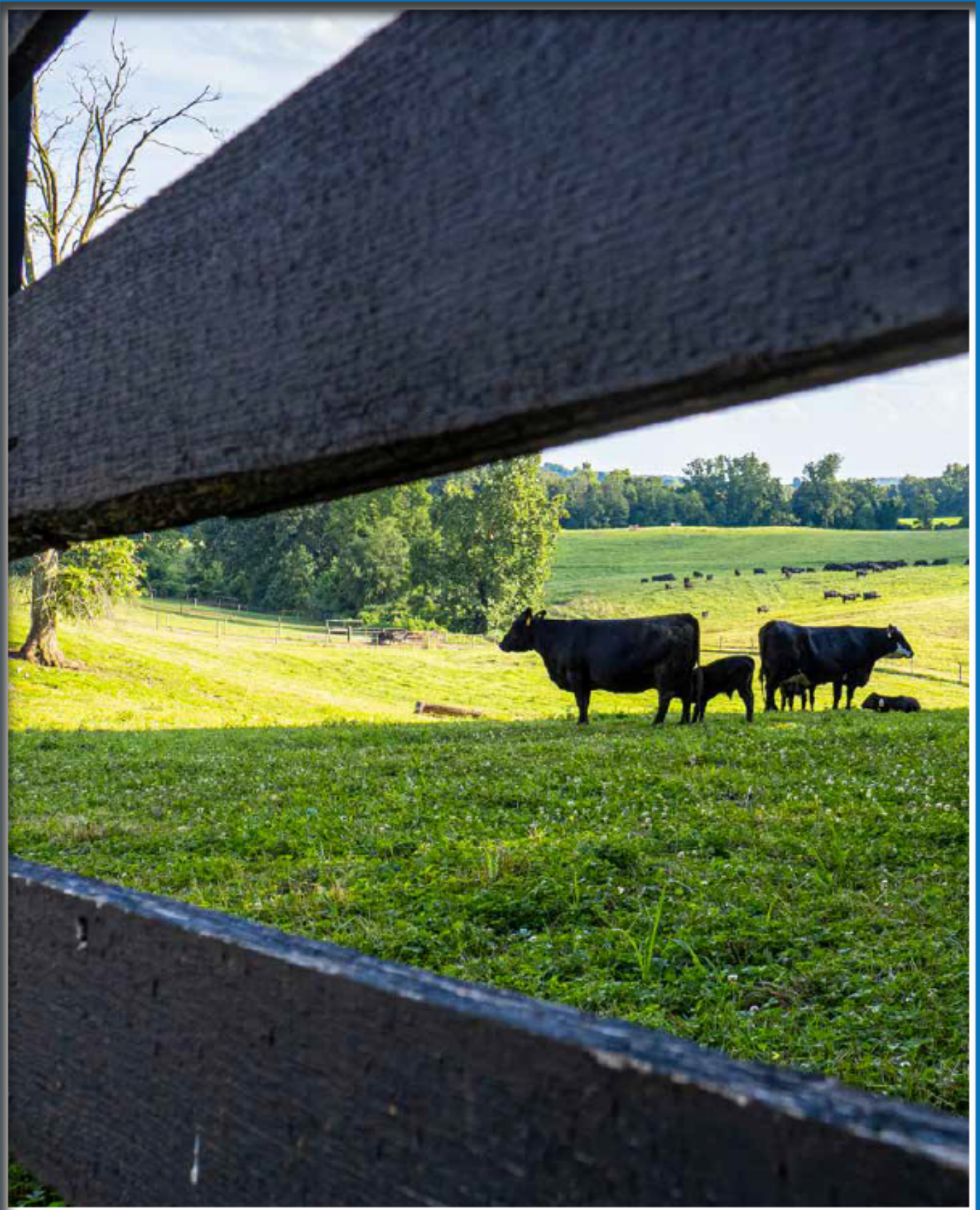
Spotlight on Science

USDA will conduct research and economic analysis on alternative crops and the food system to identify possible strategies for reducing the emissions footprint. By analyzing the economic alternatives and financial returns for major crops in the Climate Hubs' regions, USDA can inform perceptions on cropping alternatives and demonstrate environmental benefits.

communities and natural resources in the West, working with partners to restore fire resilience across multiple jurisdictions and inform decisions to allocate of community defense grant funds.

- Support rural and Tribal clean electricity generation and energy efficiency.
- Support biogas and other clean fuels production and infrastructure.
- Invest in field-scale tools for estimating greenhouse gas impacts in collaboration with other Federal agencies. Conservation Technical Assistance funding will be used to support these efforts.
- Conduct climate and agriculture research, including data collection and methodological work, to determine how the U.S. can expand carbon sequestration and woody biomass supply on limited land.
- Establish a carbon pilot program to measure carbon sequestration.
- Perform an analysis of the Northwest Forest Plan to inform decision makers on current and future possible conditions and trends in social, economic, and ecological systems.
- Assess the USDA baseline life-cycle analysis demonstrating how beef cattle production in the U.S. affects the environment so that all scientists and producers can improve the sustainability of animal agriculture.
- Improve current understanding of agricultural soil carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas emissions processes, resulting in new tools, models, and technologies for accurate assessment of greenhouse gas fluxes from agricultural systems.





Strategic Goal 2

Ensure America's Agricultural System is Equitable, Resilient, and Prosperous

A strong and prosperous agricultural sector is essential to the well-being of the U.S. economy. America's farmers and ranchers ensure a reliable food supply, support job growth, and promote economic development. To maintain an equitable and competitive agricultural sector, USDA will safeguard animal and plant health, support farmers and ranchers' ability to start and maintain profitable cooperatives and businesses and offer financial support to all producers affected by natural disasters. Additionally, USDA's research agencies will continue to introduce high-performance plants and animals and offer integrated management options to increase the efficiency of farming practices.

USDA's priorities to improve the equity and resilience of the agricultural system include:

- **Safeguarding Animal & Plant Health and Food Safety:** Safeguard animal and plant health by mitigating risks posed by pests, diseases, and the impacts of climate change to create and improve market opportunities to ensure consumers at home and abroad can trust U.S.-produced foods and the USDA brand.
- **Processing and Distribution Capacity:** Prioritize support for new and existing small- and mid-sized dispersed processing facilities to increase food supply chain resilience and economic opportunity.
- **Local and Regional Food Systems:** Examine fair competition and equitable procurement decisions, programs, and services to determine how they can enhance local and regional food systems and increase equitable opportunities with an emphasis on supporting underserved producers, cooperatives, and businesses.
- **Emerging Opportunities and Innovation:** Ensure that USDA is on the cutting edge of agriculture and create new opportunities in urban, rural, Tribal, and suburban communities.

Objective 2.1

Protect Plant and Animal Health by Minimizing Major Diseases, Pests, and Wildlife Conflicts

Objective Leader: Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

The impacts of pests, diseases, and wildlife conflicts on agricultural production, commerce, and trade can be immense. USDA must balance keeping American agriculture safe while expanding access to new agricultural markets all across the globe. Domestically, USDA conducts emergency response activities that minimize threats and their impacts on agricultural industries, adapting to changes in agricultural risk by adjusting available resources to address these threats. Concurrently, the Department embarks on collaborative research to develop pest-resistant strains of crops and new animal-disease vaccines, expedites the approval of new treatments, and develops strategies to prevent and mitigate damage related to conflicts with wildlife.

To reduce the risk of unsafe agricultural products entering the U.S., USDA incorporates mitigation strategies into international agreements and movement protocols. USDA works with its partners to conduct monitoring and surveillance efforts throughout the country to quickly detect and implement response

Learning Agenda Alignment

The USDA Learning Agenda contains one priority question aligned to this strategic goal from the Farm Production and Conservation Mission Area: **At the borrower level, what economic factors impact Farm Loan Program demand, delinquencies, and other risks?**

efforts to foreign pests and diseases that may have evaded prevention measures. This rapid response to foreign pest and disease incursions results in minimal impact to U.S. producers and disruptions to trade and contributes to the protection of American agriculture.

By employing effective prevention and mitigation tactics, USDA will reduce the impact of agricultural pests and diseases, as well as wildlife damage, to ensure that U.S. farms and ranches remain healthy and productive.

Implementation Strategies

USDA will achieve this objective through the following implementation strategies, with an emphasis on building evidence to inform decision-making:

- Conduct research to understand the various tools, methods, and data on the economic impact of citrus greening and import competition on U.S. agriculture.
- Develop a science-based policy framework for how to best identify and address zoonotic disease challenges in livestock and other farmed animals, through pilot projects for surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 in farmed wildlife and evaluation of policy alternatives.
- Perform geospatial analysis, risk analysis, and predictive modeling to inform strategies for assessing climate change impacts on Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) programs, including the development of technologies and tools to identify and mitigate impacts of invasive species, pests, and diseases. APHIS will leverage existing partnerships with academia and other Federal agencies to identify data, policies, and opportunities such as the Civilian Climate Corps that can aid in decision-making and program planning.
- Complete a National Animal Health Laboratory Network pilot project to monitor antimicrobial resistance profiles in animal pathogens and establish a long-term surveillance program with at least 30 participating laboratories.
- Develop a plan for integrating more environmentally friendly treatments into plant pest and disease response and import/export

risk mitigation measures. Through risk analysis, scientific literature and peer review, and methods development, APHIS will collect information to inform decision-making around treatment options and comply with environmental regulations.

Spotlight on Science

USDA will advance and promote its soil, plant, and animal health microbiome research to accelerate the deployment of technology and practices that improve crop and animal production, transform feed efficiencies, and increase resiliency to stress and disease.

Objective 2.2

Build Resilient Food Systems, Infrastructure, and Supply Chain

Objective Leaders: Agricultural Marketing Service; Rural Development; Farm Production and Conservation

USDA works tirelessly to ensure that the food system is fair, resilient, competitive, and distributed. USDA will continue to employ innovation and develop new markets, both at home and abroad, to ensure that these goals are met. The Department supports efforts that bolster the economic growth of U.S. growers and producers, local and regional food systems, innovative production methodologies, and marketing strategies. In response to the increased demand for local and regional foods caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, USDA will prioritize investments that strengthen these markets and ensure food supply chain resilience for the future. Investing in local and regional food systems will further enhance the share of profits for those who grow, harvest, process, and prepare our food. Further, USDA will continue to advance opportunities in new markets abroad to better enable U.S. agriculture to access and sustain market growth.

By transforming the food system's infrastructure and strengthening critical supply chains, USDA will ensure resilience against threats and disturbances and provide local and regional food systems with economic opportunities and security.

Implementation Strategies

USDA will achieve this objective through the following implementation strategies, with an emphasis on building evidence to inform decision-making:

- Assess the impact of the Department's Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and American Rescue Plan investments on key outcomes using grant performance metrics for local and regional food systems (such as partnerships developed, business development changes, diversification, and expanded market development), and the supply chain (such as feasibility studies conducted, value chain enhancements made, increased small food business activity, number of

new market access points established).

- Conduct research on the role of financing in the meat and poultry industry; the short-run effects of retaliatory tariffs on different types of U.S. farms and the distribution of Market Facilitation Program payments; and the impact of the shipping container market on supply chains.
- Implement the [Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program](#) allowing State and Tribal governments to purchase local foods from local producers, focusing on socially disadvantaged producers and targeting distribution to underserved communities.

Objective 2.3

Foster Agricultural Innovation

Objective Leaders: Office of the Chief Scientist – Research, Education, and Economics

The future of U.S. agriculture, which includes plant and animal agriculture, forestry, and aquaculture, depends on continued science, innovation, and process improvements supporting technological progress, production efficiencies, and environmental stewardship. Advancing areas with a focus on climate-smart agriculture will enable the creation of innovations to minimize the environmental footprint of agriculture and ensure sustainability while improving crop yields. New technologies and system designs are needed to produce higher-value end products from agricultural products, emerging crops, livestock, and forest feedstocks. This will enable new markets, establish new domestic supply chains, and create more jobs and economic opportunities. Increasing productivity has significant social and economic benefits for society.

USDA will prioritize innovation to meet the needs of our stakeholders and build infrastructure for the challenges of today and tomorrow, with emphasis on continuous improvement. USDA will take proactive steps to ensure that data, evaluation, and learning opportunities are central to agriculture initiatives across the Department and Nation.

Implementation Strategies

USDA will achieve this objective through the following implementation strategies, with an emphasis on building science and data to inform decision-making:

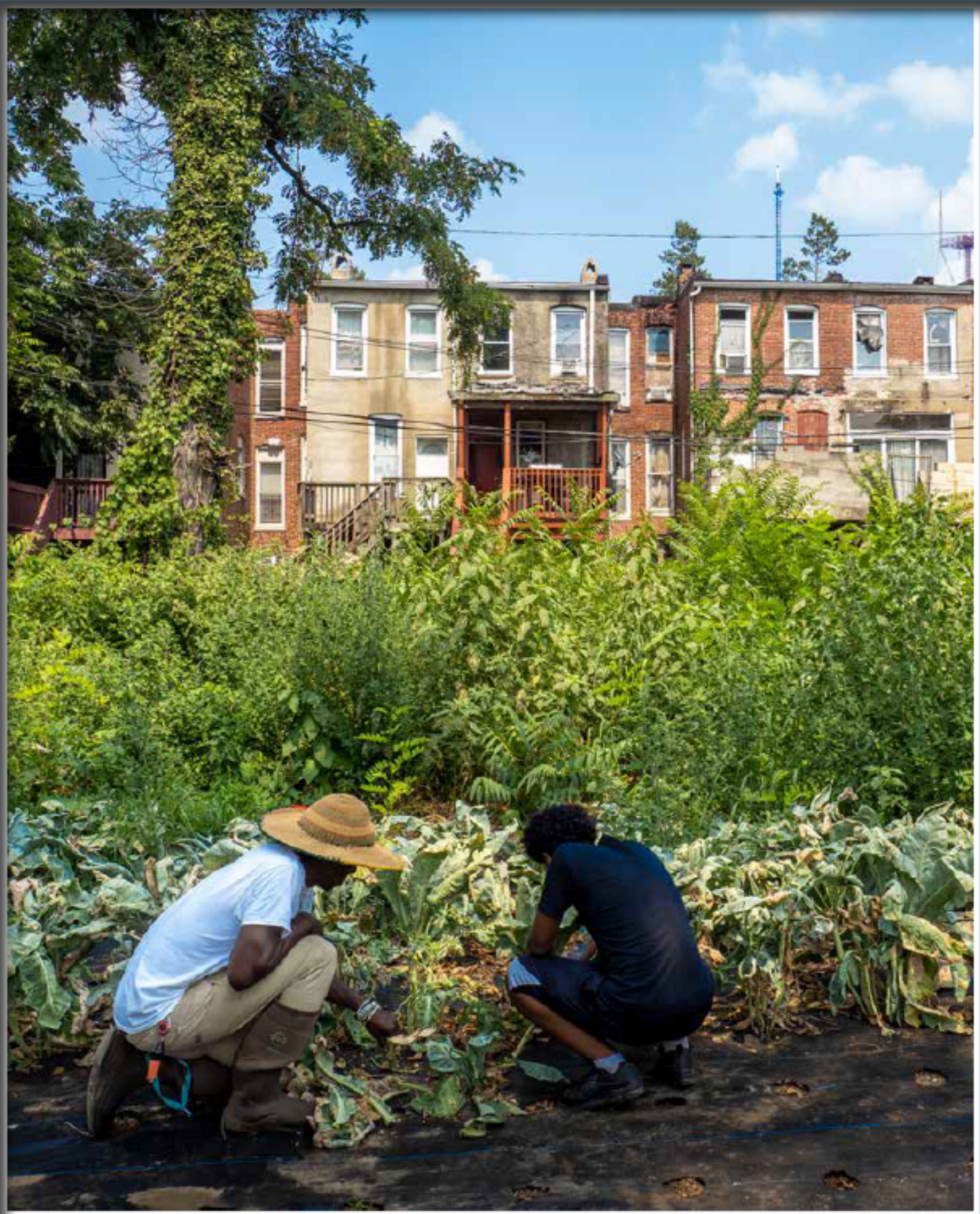
- Develop innovative, commercially viable technologies in support of agriculture and agricultural markets including programs that target local food production, development of new products, labor-saving production technologies, and protection from animal and plant disease. Implement research to develop new products, input use efficiencies, and identify uses from food byproducts and waste.

Spotlight on Science

With new technologies such as automation and remote sensing, agriculture is on the forefront of an exponential leap in productivity. USDA will conduct Value Chain research to develop an objective and measurable understanding of “value” and incorporate it as tool for evaluating future programs targeting agricultural and forestry products and innovative technologies.

- Develop and transfer technologies through partnerships with universities, colleges, and private and Federal laboratories to produce innovative and high-value products.
- Lead the [Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate](#), which seeks to address the climate crisis by uniting participants to significantly increase and accelerate investment in, or other support for, climate-smart agriculture and food systems innovation over the next five years.
- Engage stakeholders to develop inclusive collaborative partnerships that foster innovation and adoption of beneficial novel technologies.





Strategic Goal 3

Foster an Equitable and Competitive Marketplace for All Agricultural Producers

Expanding international marketing opportunities for U.S. farmers and exporters is critical to fostering business and income growth across rural America. It is essential for USDA to continue its efforts to promote American agricultural products and exports through promotion activities, development of international standards, removal of trade barriers by monitoring and enforcing existing trade agreements, and negotiation of trade agreements that benefit the U.S. agricultural economy. USDA will also work with developing countries to grow their economies and facilitate trade, developing markets of the future for all our producers.

USDA's priorities to foster an equitable and competitive marketplace include:

- *Open and Competitive Markets:* Establish fair and better markets at home and abroad that are open, transparent, and competitive.
- *Markets Abroad:* Expand and diversify export markets and improve the ability of U.S. agriculture to access and sustain successful market growth abroad through a worker-oriented, market-oriented, science-based, and rules-based trade agenda.
- *Mitigation:* Support development of climate-smart commodity production to ensure access to domestic and international markets for low-carbon goods.
- *Equity and Environmental Justice:* Design, implement, and administer programs in a way that is environmentally sound and increases access, program participation, and investments for underserved communities. Contribute to the Justice40 Initiative to assess and track benefits to disadvantaged communities disproportionately impacted by climate change.
- *Research and Development:* Focus climate research and development efforts to better understand the full range of potential climate impacts, accelerate

development of science-based solutions, inform the deployment of adaptation and mitigation strategies, and remove barriers to access. Agencies are encouraged to leverage the USDA Climate Hubs as a framework to support the delivery of climate change mitigation and adaptation science, technology, and tools.

Learning Agenda Alignment

The USDA Learning Agenda contains one priority question aligned to this strategic goal from the Farm Production and Conservation Mission Area:

At the borrower level, what economic factors impact Farm Loan Program demand, delinquencies, and other risks?

Objective 3.1

Foster Sustainable Economic Growth by Promoting Innovation, Building Resilience to Climate Change, and Expanding Renewable Energy

Objective Leaders: Farm Production and Conservation; Office of the Chief Scientist – Research, Education, and Economics; Office of the Chief Economist

According to the United Nations report, the world population is expected to reach 9.6 billion by 2050. Feeding this population will require us to adopt new technologies and scientific approaches to sustainably increase agricultural production. To ensure U.S. private working lands and public landscapes are conserved and managed for future generations, the Department will provide technical and financial assistance using the latest technology and research available. Fundamental and applied research will explore the complex interactions between human systems and the environment. This knowledge can then be shared with producers and land managers through resources, tools, and decision support, leading to enhanced adoption of climate-smart practices.

USDA is implementing a climate-smart strategy that will be integrated into Departmental programs and services beginning in FY 2022. This strategy will offer voluntary incentives to producers, landowners, and communities while being considerate of their needs as USDA works with them to address the causes and consequences of climate change. USDA will continue to play a crucial role in supporting America's rural prosperity by providing a strong safety net for America's farmers and ranchers. In addition, the Department will continue to improve program delivery and customer experience. By helping industry connect with consumers through grants and market development programs, USDA will foster new market opportunities while improving food access and market transparency. As a result, these programs and services will benefit industry stakeholders throughout the food supply chain.

Implementation Strategies

USDA will achieve this objective through the following implementation strategies, with an emphasis on building evidence to inform decision-making:

- Perform cost-benefit analyses of the implementation of the [Farm Bill](#) and other major programs, such as [Wildlife and Hurricane Indemnity Program Plus](#) and the [Market Facilitation Program](#). The findings of these analyses will help program officials, USDA leadership, and the public understand the impact of program changes and the initiation of new programs.
- In support of Executive Order 14058, Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery to Rebuild Trust in Government, FSA is reviewing its Farm Loan Programs loan applications to simplify and streamline the process and is beginning development of an integrated online application to modernize what is currently a manual process.
- Assess barriers to credit access in Farm Loan Programs with a focus on underserved producers, the use of existing loan programs and needed program modifications to support climate-smart practices and technologies that will contribute to the Justice40 Initiative, and the effectiveness of credit activities to support farmers and ranchers starting and maintaining profitable operations. Customer surveys and expanded data collection and analytics will be used in the assessments and will inform recommendations and measuring outcomes.
- Conduct an analysis of the [Farm Loan Program](#) to determine how the effectiveness of credit activities can be improved.
- Analyze alternative strategies for discretionary National program decision-making associated with [Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage Programs](#). This study will address issues such as determining the government cost impacts to changing the Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage yield cascade and identifying the types of yields that should be used in situations where county yields are missing.

- Through targeted analysis, identify strategies for maintaining and enhancing high-quality implementation of major FSA programs, including Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage, Dairy Margin Coverage, livestock disaster programs, and others.
- Refine and streamline data collection processes and systems for in-house consolidation of [Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act](#) initiatives so that they are easier to use, reduce resource needs, and improve the timeliness of data delivery. This initiative will focus on an access database that tracks foreign investment in U.S. agriculture (e.g., acquisition and disposition of land by foreign country of owner, U.S. State, and type of land).
- Identify the key data and information needed to better understand the current state of the hemp market and determine what data should be collected to support FSA and Risk Management Agency programs, including crop insurance, the [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program](#), [Farm Storage Facility Loan Program](#), and FSA credit programs.
- Support NRCS, FSA, and other USDA Agencies' climate mitigation and adaptation efforts by quickly moving technologies and innovative practices from the testbed into practice. Initiate new research efforts targeting high-impact and strategic innovations needed by NRCS and other Agencies. Leverage the Climate Hubs to connect research and program Agencies delivering science-based tools and technologies to producers.
- Develop an interactive portal for data providers to better understand the demographic profile of farm producers and advance racial justice, equity, and opportunity. As part of this effort, the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) will ease reporting barriers to provide a more complete profile of the farming population; conduct end-to-end data collection activities for a pilot survey and demonstrate the integration of existing data collection systems; integrate the portal with [Farmers.gov](#); and design and implement an authentication process.
- Implement debt relief and increase land retention opportunities for underserved farmers, ranchers, and foresters. More information on this implementation strategy can be found in the USDA Equity Action Plan.

Spotlight on Science

Using annual behavioral nudge experiments, USDA will conduct studies to determine the appropriate mix of financial incentives and technical assistance leading to increased farm use of conservation practices.

Objective 3.2

Expand Markets for Emerging Technologies, Sustainable Products, and Novel Products

Objective Leaders: Office of the Chief Scientist – Research, Education, and Economics; Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs; Agricultural Marketing Service; Office of the Chief Economist

USDA links U.S. agriculture to the world by promoting agricultural exports, which are vital to the American agricultural sector. USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) conducts export promotion activities, which help U.S. food and agricultural exporters take advantage of market opportunities. These opportunities are created by removing barriers to U.S. exports and by building trade capacity to increase demand for exports, including developing foreign markets for U.S. climate-smart agricultural products. USDA administers trade programs and activities, working in partnership with private-sector associations, land-grant universities, State and regional trade groups, U.S. food and agricultural exporters, and U.S. and foreign financial institutions. In addition, USDA's Office of the Chief Scientist (OCS) manages and provides oversight for international science and technology collaborations, which are critical to protecting and promoting USDA R&D provide the foundation upon which domestic and international markets grow.

External factors play a role in expanding international marketing opportunities. These factors include environmental conditions, such as variability in domestic and overseas crop production, natural disasters, disease outbreaks, pest infestations, and food contamination. Furthermore, important trading partners are considering criteria and preferences related to the greenhouse gas performance of agricultural commodities and products. USDA can help respond to this demand by preparing domestic producers to meet these new market opportunities.

Implementation Strategies

USDA will achieve this objective through the following implementation strategies, with an emphasis on building evidence to inform decision-making:

- As part of the [AMS Fair Trade Practices Program](#) (Packers and Stockyards Division), monitor market prices and conduct investigations of alleged unfair or anti-competitive conduct in the livestock, meat, and poultry industries. The findings of these analyses will be provided to the Office of General Counsel and U.S. Department of Justice for legal action.
- Leverage research and data from the Research, Education, and Economics Mission Area to support projects that will create more and better market opportunities and drive innovation of commercially viable technologies and products.
- Implement the [Climate-Smart Agriculture Partnership Initiative](#) to create new market opportunities for producers and landowners through the production of commodities that meet the growing demand for sustainable products in the U.S. market, as well as the preservation and expansion of export opportunities for these commodities.
- Support the increased development, purchase, and use of biobased products through the [Sustainable Aviation Fuel Grand Challenge](#), [BioPreferred Program](#), and [Wood Innovations Program](#). Biobased fuels and products create new opportunities for creating sustainable options for existing markets and for new markets with products with enhanced attributes of performance and sustainability.
- Research new, efficient, and cost-effective robotic and imaging systems for nondestructive quality assessment, grading, harvesting, and tracking of fruits and vegetables, incorporating artificial intelligence and advanced data analytics which deliver higher-quality products at more competitive costs, especially within international markets.
- Develop a USDA-wide strategic framework to facilitate the protection and promotion of USDA R&D activities. The framework will support advancement of mutually beneficial strategic international science and technology collaborations, strengthening the protection of USDA R&D against foreign government interference and exploitation and maintaining an

open environment to foster research discoveries and innovation, all with an emphasis on critical and emerging technologies.

- Leverage the USDA network of global agricultural attachés to support engagement with foreign governments and industries on trade issues related to emerging technologies, sustainable products, and novel products.
- Finalize organic rules that ensure a fair and competitive market for organic producers, including the Organic Livestock and Poultry Standard and Strengthening Organic Enforcement rule.



Objective 3.3

Expand All Producers' Access to Global Markets Through Negotiation and Enforcement of Trade Agreements

Objective Leader: Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs

Agricultural exports are crucial to the economic viability of U.S. farmers and ranchers. USDA strives to ensure that U.S. exporters can sell safe, wholesome food and agricultural products around the world. Supporting a rules-based global trading system, USDA negotiates, monitors, and enforces trade agreements to ensure global market opportunities for U.S. agriculture. USDA administers a number of programs to support the expansion of global market access and uses its market development programs to support the trade-policy efforts of industry partners. The Department also works with other government Agencies, trade associations, and organizations to maintain and establish transparent, science-based standards for U.S. agricultural products. To maintain a level playing field for exporters, USDA provides technical and scientific expertise to successfully address barriers to trade, such as tariffs, food safety, and animal and plant health issues. Through its monitoring and enforcement efforts, the Department will also ensure the realization of anticipated benefits when new agreements are implemented.

USDA relies on its worldwide network of agricultural representatives and partnerships with private-sector stakeholders to monitor foreign trade and regulatory actions that may affect exports. Removing existing barriers while preventing new ones from materializing will directly help U.S. producers thrive. USDA works to ensure that the same rules apply to countries worldwide through international standard setting, and that scientific principles are the basis for international standards and international trade decisions.

Implementation Strategies

USDA will achieve this objective through the following implementation strategies, with an emphasis on building evidence to inform decision-making:

- Identify and develop market opportunities and more diverse export markets through an economic global market review, more robust foreign engagement, trade agreements, and cooperative multilateral economic and trade forums.
- Engage in the development of trade rules and policies related to climate change, sustainability, and innovative agriculture technologies that advance the common vision of sustainable food systems by engaging and influencing outcomes in international institutions (e.g., Food and Agriculture Organization, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, World Organization for Animal Health, etc.) and through multilateral and bilateral engagements.
- Monitor and enforce existing trade agreements to ensure that USDA's partners fulfill commitments and address unfair practices and facilitate trade.
- Develop a model for assessing the costs and potential gains from non-tariff measures restricting U.S. exports.
- Engage with other Federal agencies, Congress, and foreign governments to identify key principles for reforming the global trading system to promote more market-oriented, science-driven, and rule-based institutions.
- Remove barriers to expanding market access for small and disadvantaged farmers and farm cooperatives by providing targeted outreach and technical assistance. More information on this implementation strategy can be found in the USDA Equity Action Plan.

Objective 3.4

Expand International Marketing Opportunities and Build Demand in Developing Countries Through Delivery of Technical Assistance and Capacity Building

Objective Leader: Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs

USDA advances global competitiveness through the delivery of market development programs, technical assistance, and trade capacity building. These programs support the development of export markets and adherence to a rules-based trading system. USDA administers programs to build the capacity of developing countries to integrate into the global economy and become full trading partners with the United States. USDA works with these countries to move them along the agricultural market spectrum from developing to developed economies with promising demand potential. The Department's market development programs assist U.S. exporters in increasing awareness and demand for their products worldwide. USDA also partners with domestic agricultural industries, foreign governments, and agricultural scientists, as well as overseas farmers, cooperatives, and businesses, to expand international marketing opportunities. Harnessing its extensive network of technical and scientific expertise, USDA successfully administers and implements these programs globally to the benefit of U.S. farmers and ranchers.

Implementation Strategies

USDA will achieve this objective through the following implementation strategies, with an emphasis on building evidence to inform decision-making:

- Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of marketing programs by streamlining program application and funding processes.
- Promote agricultural economic development policies that support trade with emerging economies and countries.
- Develop a mobile application for agribusiness [trade missions](#), [virtual trade events](#), and USDA-endorsed [trade shows](#) to facilitate increased participation.

- Develop and strengthen partnerships with minority-serving institutions in the implementation of international technical assistance program activities.
- Assess partnerships with the private sector and host-country governments to ensure successful collaboration and program sustainability.

Together, these activities will help strengthen agricultural systems and develop new markets for U.S. exports in developing countries. USDA will achieve this by working with other Federal agencies and foreign counterparts to develop and adopt market-based policies and institutions to create demand for U.S. exports in strategic markets.





Strategic Goal 4

Make Safe, Nutritious Food Available to All Americans

USDA plays a critical role in preventing foodborne illness and protecting public health, while ensuring Americans have access to healthy foods and beverages, as well as nutrition education that supports American agriculture and inspires public confidence. USDA is focused on ensuring that all Americans have consistent access to the safe, healthy, affordable foods and beverages essential to optimal health and well-being. While keeping the food supply safe, the Department must also reduce food insecurity and prioritize nutrition insecurity, which emphasizes providing Americans not just calories, but calories that matter for their health and well-being, as well as taking an equity lens to the Department's efforts to make safe, nutritious food available to all Americans.

To ensure that the food supply is safe, the Department will continue to enhance its food inspection system with the goal of reducing illnesses from meat, poultry, and egg products and drive compliance with food safety regulations. At the same time, USDA's research, education, and extension programs will continue to provide science, information, tools, and technologies to reduce the incidence of foodborne illness. USDA will continue to develop partnerships that support best practices in implementing effective programs to ensure that eligible populations have access to programs that support their nutrition needs.

USDA's priorities to ensure that all Americans have access to healthy, affordable foods and beverages include:

- **Food Safety:** Ensure the safety of the U.S. meat, poultry, and egg product supply, with a focus on mobilizing a stronger, more comprehensive effort to reduce Salmonella illnesses associated with poultry products.
- **Nutrition Security:** Expand access to and increase consumption of healthy and nutritious foods and beverages by all households, with a focus on racial and ethnic minority populations, lower income

Learning Agenda Alignment

The USDA Learning Agenda contains five priority questions aligned to this strategic goal from the Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services Mission Area:

- *How effective are FNS programs in addressing the food hardship crisis caused by COVID-19 and supporting the transition to post-pandemic nutrition program operations?*
- *To what extent is racial equity incorporated into internal FNS operations and the design and administration of Federal nutrition assistance programs?*
- *How effective are FNS's strategies in eliminating barriers to access to nutrition assistance programs?*
- *How effective are FNS's programs in improving nutrition security through access to nutritious foods?*
- *What program innovations are most effective in strengthening Federal oversight and management of Federal nutrition assistance programs to further improve integrity, accountability, and customer service?*

populations, and rural and remote populations. Apply innovative methods of healthy food procurement that include efforts to increase fair competition and equitable opportunities for small businesses.

- **Child Nutrition and Health:** Continue reducing food hardship while prioritizing nutrition security for children who rely on child nutrition programs administered across the Nation at schools and childcare centers during and after school and in summer. Continue supporting program administrators at the site level, including food service providers.

- *Maternal and Infant Health:* Focus on innovative strategies to enhance the Department’s ability to improve maternal and infant health outcomes and reduce disparities through the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for [Women, Infants, and Children \(WIC\)](#).
- *Program Modernization:* Work with partners across government to continue modernizing the delivery of nutrition program benefits through user-centered service design and more effective use of technology.

To accomplish these priorities, USDA relies on its sound science, data, and research strategy to benefit all Americans. It is fundamental to the Department’s work to continue to deliver services and programs effectively, efficiently, and with integrity to eligible individuals and households to ensure they have access to safe and nutritious food.

Spotlight on Science

USDA will continue foundational research on the link between agricultural production and environmental change, its impact on nutrient and non-nutrient components, human health, and food safety. It is also working to ensure that breeding strategies do not compromise nutritional value, linking precision agricultural to precision nutrition.

Objective 4.1

Increase Food Security Through Assistance and Access to Nutritious and Affordable Food

Objective Leader: Food and Nutrition Service

USDA is committed to ensuring that every American has access to nutritious and affordable foods and beverages. The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is responsible for administering Federal domestic nutrition assistance programs while linking scientific research to the nutrition needs of consumers. The Department strives to make benefits accessible to those eligible to participate in nutrition assistance programs such as WIC and the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#). While USDA’s ultimate objective is for economic opportunity to make nutrition assistance unnecessary for as many individuals and families as possible, the Department recognizes that this is not feasible for certain populations, such as those with special needs. This is a mission that no single agency can meet independently.

All efforts by USDA seek to ensure that nutrition assistance programs positively impact the communities they serve. The Department will use all available opportunities, including new communication mechanisms, to serve customers innovatively, offer flexibility to partners, and administer programs as effectively as possible to serve targeted populations. USDA will continue to work with its partners across government, non-government organizations, academic institutions, and the private sector to implement effective programs and ensure that all Americans have access to programs that support their nutrition needs.

Implementation Strategies

USDA will achieve this objective through the following implementation strategies, with an emphasis on building evidence to inform decision-making:

- Study the key factors associated with variations in food security rates in persistent-poverty counties to better understand the relationship between poverty, well-being, and food security. The study

will include representative surveys and interviews in at least six persistent-poverty counties. This evaluation is included in the Department-wide FY 2023 Evaluation Plan.

- Analyze the extent to which mobile technologies affect participant access to SNAP benefits. This study will be piloted in up to five States to analyze participant access, ease of use, and program integrity to facilitate decisions around broadly authorizing the use of mobile technologies. This evaluation is included in the Department-wide FY 2023 Evaluation Plan.
- Support improved State agency data collection and reporting processes for [SNAP Nutrition Education](#) and promote evidence-based nutrition education and obesity prevention interventions through a combination of educational strategies and social marketing coupled with policy, system, and environmental interventions to promote healthy eating and active living.
- Leverage existing research, preliminary data, and results from rigorous demonstration efforts to strengthen [Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer](#) and subsequently implement the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer program to provide nutritious meals to children during the summer, when only 13.8% of children receiving free and reduced-price lunches during the school year participates in summer child feeding programs, or during school closures.
- Expand the ability to use WIC benefits via online purchasing and support WIC State Agencies that are pursuing online ordering and online transactions. Bringing these shopping innovations to participants is expected to improve the WIC shopping experience, increase equity in the program by allowing participants to shop like all other shoppers, and increase WIC benefit redemptions.
- Conduct research to better understand declines in participation in WIC and the role of social, economic, and policy contexts of local communities (e.g., broadband availability and adoption) in overall Federal nutrition assistance program participation.
- Evaluate State agency implementation of [The](#)

[Emergency Food Assistance Program Reach](#)

and [Resiliency grants](#) to better understand the emergency food landscape and measure the ongoing impact of the grants in expanding access to the Emergency Food Assistance Program in rural, Tribal, and underserved communities.

- Promote and enhance nutrition security by aligning benefits with the latest science, modernizing the Department's nutrition assistance programs to improve access, and prioritizing equity every step of the way.
- Develop a Nutrition Security Promotion Plan and create an Administrator Initiative on Nutrition Security to chart progress over at least the next three years.
- Develop innovative strategies to prioritize nutrition security and develop a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive pipeline of nutrition professionals through collaborative relationships with land-grant universities and stakeholders through a variety of programs. These programs include the [Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program](#), [Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program](#), [Community Food Projects](#), and [Agriculture and Food Research Initiatives projects](#). Collaborative relationships could cover areas such as diet, health, and chronic disease; food and human health; and dietary biomarkers, among others.
- Evaluate the extent to which robotic process automation improves the efficiency of SNAP application processing. This evaluation is included in the Department-wide FY 2023 Evaluation Plan.

Spotlight on Science

USDA is enhancing its research to understand disparities of equity within food systems and improve understanding of the factors influencing food and nutrition security, as well as access to and affordability and healthfulness of the food supply. Efforts to innovate and integrate precision nutrition into agricultural, food, nutrition, public health, and dietary research will inform future program operations.

Objective 4.2

Encourage Healthy Dietary Choices through Data-Driven, Flexible, Customer-Focused Approaches

Objective Leader: Food and Nutrition Service

USDA shapes programs and policies and develops knowledge resources to promote healthy eating at individual, family, household, and community levels. The Department further uses these tools to promote fruit and vegetable consumption and other healthy eating behaviors through public-private partnerships and cutting-edge technologies. The Department is also working to improve access to healthful, locally produced food in underserved communities through a multifaceted strategy focused on food production, distribution, and both traditional and non-traditional retail options.

The Department is committed to working collaboratively with other Federal agencies, State partners, and other interested stakeholders on an array of strategies to reduce childhood obesity and prioritize nutrition security. For example, through WIC, USDA is encouraging participating mothers to breastfeed their infants by strengthening breastfeeding policy and program activities. USDA will also work to ensure that schools and childcare providers have the resources and flexibility to serve top-quality, healthy, and appealing meals.

Implementation Strategies

USDA will achieve this objective through the following implementation strategies, with an emphasis on building evidence to inform decision-making:

- Continue examining the associations between participation in WIC and maternal and infant health outcomes (e.g., maternal mortality) in partnership with the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. Hold a stakeholder meeting to discuss the results of this assessment and plan future studies and actions.
- Conduct an analysis of the Farm to School Program, which aims to educate students on agriculture,

food, and nutrition and increase the availability of local foods in child nutrition programs. As part of this effort, examine disparities in and barriers to access to local foods and participation in other Farm to School activities.

- Pilot the use of mobile technologies for the purpose of accessing SNAP benefits. Through the Mobile Payment Pilot, design and execute five pilot projects to determine if the use of mobile technology should be authorized nationwide. Work in collaboration with State Agencies to allow some SNAP participants to input their Electronic Benefit Transfer card into a mobile device and make SNAP purchases at the point-of-sale without the presence of the Electronic Benefit Transfer card.
- Develop and launch, using grant funding and in collaboration with selected grantees, an online ecommerce platform and a suite of services for farmers and markets that participate in SNAP. Increase the participation of Direct Market Farmers and Farmers Markets in SNAP online purchasing and provide easier access to fresh produce and healthy meal options for SNAP recipients.
- Conduct a suite of studies and evaluations of USDA child nutrition programs, on topics such as the association between meal costs and quality and the variation in local school wellness policies by the income, racial, or ethnic diversity of the school. Conduct single-topic studies with shorter timeframes to respond to emerging policy and program needs.
- Carry out additional research and evaluation activities identified in the FNS [Research and Evaluation Plan](#) aligned to this strategic objective.

Spotlight on Science

USDA is utilizing interdisciplinary scientific methods such as nutrition anthropology, behavioral science, and behavioral economics to develop education and outreach that translates precision nutrition findings into consumer behavior, resulting in healthier food choices among different groups and communities.

Objective 4.3

Prevent Foodborne Illness and Protect Public Health

Objective Leader: Food Safety and Inspection Service

The [USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service \(FSIS\)](#) is committed to protecting public health, including the health of consumers and the safety of workers, by ensuring the safety of the Nation's commercial supply of meat, poultry, and egg products. Thousands of inspectors across the Nation work to achieve this mission every day by verifying industry compliance with U.S. food safety regulations. USDA's regulatory oversight and enforcement extends to both imported and domestically produced food products and assures consistent application of regulations and statutes.

USDA will continue to invest in innovation of its inspection strategies, policies, and scientific approaches so that fewer people in the U.S. become ill from foodborne pathogens. Specifically, Salmonella in poultry remains a significant food safety concern in the U.S. More than 1 million Salmonella illnesses occur annually, with over 23% attributed to poultry consumption. The Department is committed to reducing Salmonella illnesses associated with poultry products and is taking a stronger, more comprehensive approach to protecting consumers. USDA is also strengthening ongoing collaboration with a broad range of stakeholders to enhance and promote food safety. USDA works with international partners and standards-setting organizations (e.g., the Codex Alimentarius Commission) to develop science-based international food safety standards, which will help ensure the safety of imported foods.

Implementation Strategies

USDA will achieve this objective through the following implementation strategies, with an emphasis on building evidence to inform decision-making:

- Collaborate with the Food and Drug Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, industry, consumer advocates, and academics to identify next steps for reducing salmonellosis to reach the [Healthy People 2030 Goals](#).
- Approve pilot projects in poultry slaughter and processing establishments that will test different control strategies for Salmonella contamination in poultry products. Begin collection of data that will be analyzed by FSIS to determine whether it supports changes to the Agency's existing Salmonella control strategies.
- Seek advice from the National Advisory Committee for Microbiological Criteria in Foods, an independent Federal advisory committee, on how FSIS can build on the latest science to improve its approach to Salmonella control in poultry.
- Conduct priority research to address data gaps and develop new laboratory methods to guide future Salmonella policy.
- Conduct research to support USDA programs that aim to ensure food safety, including the [Food Safety Outreach Project](#) and Agriculture and Food Research Initiatives, in a variety of areas, such as food safety and defense, novel foods and innovative manufacturing technologies, and mitigating antimicrobial resistance across the food chain.

Spotlight on Science

USDA will leverage cutting-edge technology to identify virulence factors in pathogens, including antimicrobial resistance, and develop new innovations in reducing pathogen occurrence in food systems.

¹ Interagency Food Safety Analytics Collaboration, 2021. Foodborne illness source attribution estimates for 2019 for Salmonella, Escherichia coli O157, Listeria monocytogenes, and Campylobacter using multi-year outbreak surveillance data, United States. Atlanta, Georgia and Washington, District of Columbia: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, CDC, FDA, USDA/FSIS.



Strategic Goal 5

Expand Opportunities for Economic Development and Improve Quality of Life in Rural and Tribal Communities

Rural America provides our Nation's food and energy resources, produces the fiber for goods and manufacturing, contributes more than 35% of our Nation's military members, and operates about 80% of the Nation's critical infrastructure lifelines. Unfortunately, it is also where the country's majority of underserved communities and persistently poor families reside and where repeat disaster losses and climate change risks occur. It is also home to the country's fastest aging population, as well as the majority of the Nation's aging infrastructure. USDA is taking bold action to promote rural prosperity and economic development by providing technical assistance and financing investments in rural water, electric, broadband, housing, community facilities, local and regional food systems, and rural businesses and cooperatives. USDA will leverage funds, stimulate private-public partnerships, and collaborate with communities to increase economic opportunities in underserved communities and build rural infrastructure. This includes working with Federal partners and various stakeholder groups to help rural and Tribal communities thrive.

USDA's priorities for improving the quality of life in rural and Tribal communities include:

- *Build Trust:* Prioritize upholding civil rights and building trust with underserved communities, including Tribal Nations, through equitable and inclusive customer service and actions.
- *Reduce Barriers to Access:* Design, implement, and administer programs in a way that increases access and program participation for underserved communities, including but not limited to communities of color; farmworkers; immigrants; refugees; veterans; people with disabilities; LGBTQ+ individuals; and young, small-scale, and beginning farmers.

- *Invest in Underserved Communities:* Ensure USDA investments and services are directed to persistently poor, socially vulnerable, or high-need places, using data to understand who benefits from USDA programs and services, in alignment with the objectives of the Justice40 Initiative.
- *Foster Innovation and Partnership:* Ensure that rural and Tribal communities are economically competitive, can foster innovation, and leverage regional partnerships.

Learning Agenda Alignment

The USDA Learning Agenda contains three priority questions aligned to this strategic goal from the Rural Development Mission Area:

- *What are the short- and long-term economic and social impacts of Rural Development programs, including indirect and spillover effects?*
- *How effective are existing Rural Development initiatives (e.g., eliminating unnecessary paperwork, improving stakeholder outreach, providing technical assistance to applicants, etc.) in improving equitable program access to historically disadvantaged and underserved communities?*
- *How can Rural Development more effectively partner and leverage its resources to increase investments from other government entities, the private sector, and philanthropies?*

Objective 5.1

Improve Rural and Tribal Community Infrastructure, Including Affordable E-Connectivity, Cornerstone Community Facilities, Sustainable and Reliable Power, and Clean and Safe Water and Sewer Systems

Objective Leader: Rural Development

USDA is committed to building infrastructure in rural and Tribal America so people can be safe and healthy, with the opportunity to drive local and global economies no matter where they live. In rural and Tribal communities, broadband provides access to jobs, banking, and markets for farmers and small businesses. USDA will work to bring reliable broadband to rural people where they are—in their homes, communities, and businesses—to reach areas without sufficient access and move the Nation towards 100% high-speed coverage for all Americans. The Biden-Harris Administration has prioritized the development of broadband infrastructure to strengthen education, health care, public services, and economic opportunity throughout rural America. USDA will further promote healthy communities and the sustainable growth and diversification of local rural and Tribal economies, as well as increased capacity to participate successfully in regional, National, and global economies, through investment in health care, education, and other community facilities.

These efforts rely on bedrock investments in sustainable, reliable power and clean water and sewer systems.

USDA's historic work to electrify the Nation continues through voluntary investments and risk management that will help cut a path to fight climate change while maintaining the vitality of rural electric cooperatives. Under the leadership of the Biden-Harris administration, USDA will upgrade power infrastructure, improve access to clean drinking water and sewer systems, and invest in strategic rural infrastructure to make these communities economically viable and livable, investing in the people who need it most.

Implementation Strategies

USDA will achieve this objective through the following implementation strategies, with an emphasis on building evidence to inform decision-making:

- Strong digital economies enable rural communities to chart their own courses toward prosperity. Access to broadband is at the foundation of digital economy ecosystem strategies, which include growing the economy with digital jobs, technical skill-building, entrepreneurship, and smart amenities to retain and attract working-age adults in rural communities. Rural Development is committed to exploring and implementing innovative approaches to supporting the funding of broadband across its portfolio of loan and grant programs in order to alleviate the rural e-connectivity gap. Rural Development is expanding its outreach and technical assistance efforts and continues to reduce loan processing times through the streamlining of work processes and staff training.
- Evaluate the impact of USDA broadband programs on broadband availability, use, economic outcomes (e.g., property values, household income, employment) and social outcomes (e.g., population growth, health care access and availability, telemedicine). This evaluation is included in the Department-wide FY 2023 Evaluation Plan.
- Evaluate the impact of the [Water and Environmental Programs](#) on service availability, affordable water quality for underserved communities, property values (residential, agricultural, and commercial property), income and earnings, poverty, and population growth across the rural-urban continuum. This evaluation is included in the Department-wide FY 2023 Evaluation Plan.
- Develop performance indicators to measure the extent to which USDA leverages funds, stimulates public-private partnerships, and engages in collaboration

to build rural infrastructure. This infrastructure includes broadband, community facilities, safe and affordable housing, and health services and facilities.

- Evaluate the collective impact of program investments on the socioeconomic well-being of rural communities as measured by the Economic Innovation Group's [Distressed Communities Index](#). This evaluation is included in the Department-wide FY 2023 Evaluation Plan.
- Develop Key Performance Dashboards to track the performance of relevant programs and provide actionable information to decision makers.
- Evaluate the impact of [Community Facilities Program](#) funding on rural hospital closings and education (e.g., school quality). This evaluation is included in the Department-wide FY 2023 Evaluation Plan.



Objective 5.2

Boost the Financial Security of Rural and Tribal Communities through Access to Affordable Housing

Objective Leader: Rural Development

Access to affordable and safe housing is at the foundation of strong communities, healthy families, and vibrant economies. USDA is committed to ensuring that people living in rural and Tribal communities have equitable and affordable access to housing. The Department is on the frontlines of the affordable housing crisis and is committed to ensuring access to housing security in rural and Tribal communities. This commitment includes not only the building, repairing, and preserving of housing, but also reducing barriers to accessing housing and maintaining housing security. During the COVID-19 pandemic, USDA has worked to reduce foreclosures and evictions across rural America. Under President Biden's American Rescue Plan, USDA was provided with funding to provide re-financing opportunities to distressed homeowners, as well as vital rental assistance to rent-overburdened tenants. As USDA works to address rural housing challenges, Rural Development will improve delivery of its housing programs and resources by embedding key Departmental priorities such as climate and equity. This includes continuing to identify opportunities to make housing more accessible, expanding outreach into underserved rural and Tribal communities, and committing to creating more sustainable and energy efficient housing. In doing so, Rural Development will help keep families in rural America financially secure in their homes, especially in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Implementation Strategies

USDA will achieve this objective through the following implementation strategies, with an emphasis on building evidence to inform decision-making:

- Continue to expand stakeholder participation and facilitate the involvement of local, Tribal, and State governments to support inclusive rural prosperity efforts. This is particularly important to addressing

the affordable housing crisis and partnering to encourage the increase in the production and maintenance of single-family houses in rural and Tribal areas.

- Take a holistic approach to leveraging affordable housing to grow economic prosperity for rural and Tribal communities.
- Conduct analyses of housing stock to identify geographies of greatest need for new construction, repair, and preservation funding.
- Implement the Environmental Protection Agency's Portfolio Manager, which will assist in reducing baselining energy consumption in USDA multi-family properties.
- Partner with Federal agencies such as the U.S. Department of Energy and the White House Council on Environmental Quality to set goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in rural housing.

Spotlight on Science

Valuable data and information can help elucidate past and current injustices and seek to balance prospects among rural and Tribal communities, as well as small operators. USDA will examine and ease reporting barriers to ensure underserved and hard-to-reach populations are included in the Census of Agriculture, resulting in a more complete profile of the farming population.

Objective 5.3

Increase Capacity, Sustainability, and Economic Vitality in Rural and Tribal Communities

Objective Leader: Rural Development

At USDA, we work to increase prosperity in rural communities and for the people who call these communities home. We believe that local and Tribal governments and nonprofit organizations are critical to the success of their communities. Beyond infrastructure, these entities are on the front line of local community and economic development, and their effectiveness is a determining factor in the well-being of their communities. Similarly, businesses and cooperatives play a critical role in sustaining and growing local economies in rural and Tribal areas. However, too many local partners struggle to access Federal resources and develop public-private partnerships. USDA seeks to provide resources that help these local efforts have the expertise and staffing needed to tackle hard local problems. Capacity building resources include effective technical assistance, strategic use of information technology, regular and meaningful stakeholder engagement, and improved customer experience. USDA programs prioritize access to capital and financing for businesses and cooperatives in rural and Tribal communities to create jobs, grow the tax base, and cultivate a diverse, equitable economy.

In the spirit of building back better, this Administration will prioritize economic development and growth in rural America by making it central to USDA's mission. The Rural Partners Network, launching in spring 2022, is a collaboration among Federal agencies and local partners to advance equitable rural prosperity through local job creation, infrastructure development, and community improvement to benefit everyone who lives in a rural community. The Network, led by USDA Rural Development, is pursuing this goal by applying a broad strategy to make it easier for all rural communities to access a full range of Federal programs and funding opportunities, as well as by using a focused, localized strategy for in-depth, place-based community economic development support.

Under the Rural Partners Network, multiple Federal agencies are committing staff, tools, and resources to provide communities with a seamless, all-of-government experience. Using a complement of technical assistance tools and resources, USDA will help boost the economic and developmental capacities of the Nation's communities, encouraging long-term rural growth and success, especially in communities of need in states, Tribes, colonias, and territories.

The Proposed Rural Partnership Program in President Biden's American Jobs Plan will help rural regions, including Tribal Nations, build on their unique assets and realize their vision for inclusive community and economic development. This program will empower rural regions by supporting locally led planning and capacity-building efforts and by providing flexible funding to meet critical needs.

The Department will harness its vast resources to target underserved communities and those who have been marginalized to help them realize their full potential. Through funding, technical assistance, and focused capacity-building initiatives, USDA will bolster the ability of rural and Tribal areas to thrive, ensuring sustainable growth that builds generational wealth and enriches communities.

Implementation Strategies

USDA will achieve this objective through the following implementation strategies, with an emphasis on building evidence to inform decision-making:

- Collaborate with other Federal agencies, State and local governments, non-profits, and the private sector on place-based and sector-based strategies (e.g., leveraging Federal funds across agencies, layering technical assistance, and coordinating sectoral development such as food supply chain support and outdoor recreation) to more efficiently and effectively foster rural prosperity and economic development. This will be a focus of the new Rural Partners Network.
- Expand technical assistance and access to capital for businesses and cooperatives in rural and Tribal communities, including the ability to leverage other financing opportunities through public-private partnerships.
- Improve outreach to underserved and hard-to-reach populations, remove barriers to participation, and engage rural farming communities to participate in the Census of Agriculture.
- Evaluate how to prioritize distressed, underserved, persistently-poor, and marginalized communities in existing and new programs and tailor assistance accordingly.
- Increase access to capital and economic benefits in underserved communities through targeted technical assistance, improved grants policy, Justice40 initiatives, workforce development programs, and other such initiatives. More information on this implementation strategy can be found in the USDA Equity Action Plan.
- Meaningfully expand procurement opportunities for small-disadvantaged businesses through targeted industry outreach and a renewed emphasis on supplier diversity. More information on this implementation strategy can be found in the USDA Equity Action Plan.
- Strengthen Tribal sovereignty and advance Tribal self-determination by improving government-to-government relations with these communities. More information on this implementation strategy can be found in the USDA Equity Action Plan.

Objective 5.4

Promote Environmental Justice by Maximizing Sustainable and Green Economic Development in Rural and Tribal Communities

Objective Leader: Rural Development

Rural and Tribal communities are disproportionately impacted by the effects of climate change and other stressors, such as negative health impacts from air and water pollution and disruptions to critical food systems. For the many rural Americans whose livelihoods are dependent on the agriculture, forestry, and outdoor recreation industries, the threat of climate change is particularly dire, and these communities are often limited in their ability to adapt due to economic or social constraints. Growth in green jobs is critical for enhancing the sustainable economic growth of these communities.

USDA is committed to making meaningful investments in rural America that will help pave the way in clean, renewable energy infrastructure and production and energy efficiency improvements that will create new job and market opportunities. The Department will continue to leverage existing partnerships with rural and Tribal communities to understand the most critical climate vulnerabilities and risks, identify barriers to adaptation, and develop solutions that promote environmental justice and address the causes of climate change. In alignment with the Biden-Harris Administration's focus on equity, USDA will strive to ensure that programs and resources intended to mitigate the effects of climate change are distributed equitably and are accessible to those most in need.

Implementation Strategies

USDA will achieve this objective through the following implementation strategies, with an emphasis on building evidence to inform decision-making:

- Maximize the benefits of the Justice40-covered programs by mapping disadvantaged communities using the Distressed Communities Index (DCI), awarding priority points for projects that

support administration priorities like climate impact and equity, establishing key performance indicators documenting investments to distressed communities, engaging communities through better outreach, and finding opportunities across the Mission Area to advance climate justice aims.

- Increase investment in coal, oil and gas, and power plant communities to create good-paying jobs, spur economic revitalization, remediate environmental degradation, and support energy workers. Rural and Tribal communities are disproportionately impacted by the effects of climate change and other stressors, such as experiencing negative health impacts from air and water pollution and disruptions to critical food systems. As a member of the Interagency Working Group on Coal and Power Plant Communities and Economic Revitalization, Rural Development is encouraging and awarding priority points to projects that improve the livelihoods of community residents and meet pollution mitigation or clean energy goals. This is part of Rural Development's framework for prioritizing projects that address the key challenges facing rural America. This funding priority supports the Administration's mission to help the people of rural America build back better, by helping them recover economically from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, by ensuring all rural residents have equitable access to Rural Development programs, and by reducing climate pollution and increasing resiliency to the impacts of climate change.
- Explore the impact of infrastructure investments on greenhouse gas emissions through an assessment of the [Rural Utilities Service](#). Explore how the impact of dollars invested can be measured and captured post-project completion without creating unnecessary burden on program recipients.
- Lead efforts across the Research, Education, and Economic Mission Areas to catalog all climate and environmental science programs supporting disadvantaged communities. Identify metrics to track the benefits of such programs to program recipients.

- Monitor and assess the recreational use of National Forest System lands to identify areas of greater use, determine how National Forest Service lands are currently being used, and inform resource decisions.
- Improve performance measurement around recreation to reflect inclusive and increase access to communities of diversity. This includes reviewing current surveying methods and implementing additional questions around visitor experience, demographics, etc. and reviewing and revising current outreach methods to ensure inclusivity and access.



Strategic Goal 6

Attract, Inspire, and Retain an Engaged and Motivated Workforce that's Proud to Represent USDA

At USDA, we are committed to reaching new heights by recruiting, onboarding, supporting, and retaining a diverse and talented workforce and cultivating a workplace environment that is collaborative, service-oriented, mission-centered, healthy, inclusive, and welcoming. This includes leaders and staff who work together to build a culture that welcomes, respects, and supports everyone in reaching their highest potential by ensuring equal opportunity compliance, providing proactive civil rights, and championing USDA's zero-tolerance policy for unlawful discrimination and sexual harassment for all employees. We believe this focus on organizational culture will enable us to build the USDA back better as a premier organization and model employer that lives by its values.

As the landscape of talent continues to evolve, it is imperative that USDA seek to continuously find ways to attract talent that represents the diversity of America. The COVID-19 pandemic has also catapulted leaders to rethink and reimagine where and how we work. In the coming years, we will build on best practices for a hybrid work environment and continue to evaluate the future of work at USDA. As such, we are committed to being a learning organization that tolerates risk-taking, explores the untested and unknown, and nurtures innovative ideas at all levels of the organization. We will prioritize learning and training throughout the employee experience at USDA.

USDA's strategies to make the Department a great place for everyone to work and an employer of choice include:

- *Employee Health, Wellness, and Safety:* Prioritize employee health and safety and take concrete steps to support employee wellness and mental health.
- *Modern Workplace:* Reimagine how we work using new tools such as data dashboards to make data-driven decisions and create sustainable efficiencies around process and business operations.
- *Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility:* Uphold

civil rights; advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility; and create a culture that respects, welcomes, and supports all employees, including LGBTQ+ individuals and people with disabilities.

- *Time Management and Process Improvement:* Encourage all employees to be creative and innovative with an eye towards improving existing processes and systems to reduce processing times and paperwork, build trust in government, and ensure time is well spent.
- *Science, Data, Evaluation and Continual Learning:* Strive to be a data-driven, customer experience-centered, learning organization that embraces innovation, makes smart and equitable decisions about technology and procurement, builds an infrastructure for the challenges of today and tomorrow, insists on continuous improvement, and listens to feedback.

Objective 6.1

Foster a Culture of Civil Rights, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility, Transparency, and Accountability

Objective Leaders: All Mission Areas and Agencies

USDA is committed to the values of equity and inclusion, rooted in justice and equal opportunity for our employees and those we serve. Under the leadership of the Biden-Harris Administration, the Department is taking bold, historic action to root out generations of systemic racism, deeply integrate equity into decision-making and policymaking, and build equitable systems and programming for all Americans. USDA is standing up an independent Equity Commission to examine USDA programs and services and make recommendations as to how the Department can advance equity by reducing barriers to access for historically underserved communities. The Department also launched its inaugural Racial Justice and Equity Internal Working Group to review internal systems and processes and identify inequities, challenges, and opportunities for improvement.

Understanding how USDA both advances and inhibits equity and opportunity for our existing and potential customers requires employees at every level to listen carefully to and meaningfully engage customers; build relationships with a diverse set of stakeholders and partners; take a critical look at our data; and examine the design, implementation, and impact of programs and systems throughout the Department. From equitable contracting and procurement decisions to the implementation of staffing plans including diverse recruiting, hiring, training, rewarding, and promoting, there are opportunities for equity throughout. As we strengthen the culture and support for our workforce, USDA has a responsibility to attract and invest in the next generation of agricultural leaders through a premier internship experience. USDA leaders will make time and space for internal review and reflection so that we can build an organization, culture, and workforce with the necessary skills and tools to ensure knowledge management, efficiency, and inclusion.

Implementation Strategies

USDA will achieve this objective through the following implementation strategies, with an emphasis on accountability and building evidence to inform decision-making:

- Implement “Future of Work” strategies that enable USDA to effectively oversee and implement staff, operations, and program delivery in a hybrid environment. This should include a synergistic relationship between administrative and program leaders and staff.
- Establish and build a community of senior executives, hiring managers, supervisors, and leadership teams who are well-equipped and prepared to implement and drive cultural changes with Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access (DEIA); transparency; and accountability in mind.
- Institutionalize employee engagement strategies, foster idea sharing, and ensure diverse perspectives are truly welcome in every Agency and program.
- Facilitate a productive and collaborative relationship with union officials.
- Leverage best practices and system changes that ensure the work environment is safe, respectful, inclusive, free from harassment, and enables all leaders and employees to cross-collaborate and do their best work.
- Develop workforce strategies that intentionally utilize [Equal Employment Opportunity Management Directive 715](#) and the [Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey](#) to inform DEIA actions and leverage special hiring authorities to efficiently drive urgent equity outcomes. More information on this implementation strategy can be found in the USDA Equity Action Plan.

Objective 6.2

Establish a Customer-Centric, Inclusive, High-Performing Workforce that is Representative of America and the Communities We Serve

Objective Leaders: All Mission Areas and Agencies

The Department strives to make USDA a great place to work for everyone, with a focus on restoring the confidence and morale of the workforce following the COVID-19 pandemic. Through their mission delivery, engaged and empowered employees will find creative solutions to unexpected challenges; they will bring innovation to their customer service delivery; they will display curiosity and collaboration across Agency and Mission Area lines; they will celebrate each other's thoughts and experiences; and they will serve as ambassadors to recruit and retain a talented workforce that will ensure USDA's continued future success and evolution.

To maintain a high-performing, customer-centric workforce, USDA will continue to foster a work environment that maximizes employee performance, which is directly tied to an individual's level of empowerment and engagement. Through mutual respect and collaboration, USDA leadership will make the Department a safe, fair, and rewarding workplace for all employees. We want USDA staff to be passionate and engaged, carrying out the important work every day that will help move our Nation forward.

Implementation Strategies

USDA will achieve this objective through the following implementation strategies, with an emphasis on building evidence to inform decision-making:

- Develop and implement a DEIA strategic plan that will enable USDA to hire, train, retain, and manage diverse talents who are able to serve and represent the communities we serve.
- Assess staff recruitment and selection practices as they relate to DEIA to develop partnerships and improved outreach strategies aimed at increasing

access to workforce development opportunities.

- Conduct a review of position descriptions and scope and complexity of duties to perform statistical and comparative analyses of USDA in relation to similar positions in the labor market.
- Strategically utilize existing youth and workforce development programs such as [Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers](#), [Public Land Corps](#), [Land Grant University Partnerships](#), and other special hiring authorities as diverse talent pipelines to meet USDA's increasing talent demands.
- Implement internal DEIA training, dialogue, and other tools and resources to enable the USDA workforce to improve customer service in underserved communities. More information on this implementation strategy can be found in the USDA Equity Action Plan.
- Integrate coordinated stakeholder engagement, diversity outreach, and customer feedback as standard practices in process improvement and program delivery. More information on this implementation strategy can be found in the USDA Equity Action Plan.
- Ensure that Federal Advisory Committee Act committees and boards become more diverse over time through creative recruitment strategies. More information on this implementation strategy can be found in the USDA Equity Action Plan.
- Assess needs and provide translated outreach materials and translation services for underserved communities and customers that have limited English proficiency. More information on this implementation strategy can be found in the USDA Equity Action Plan.

Spotlight on Science

USDA's science agencies are leading efforts to build a workforce pipeline of diverse, nimble, and resilient Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics employees through the expansion of degree, certificate, curriculum, and youth programs that will support the research workforce of the future.

Objective 6.3

Promote USDA Operational Excellence Through Better Use of Technology and Shared Solutions

Objective Leaders: All Mission Areas and Agencies

The Department strives to fully leverage modern human-centered design, data, technology, and digital services to provide our internal and external customers with easy-to-navigate online tools to increase access to our critical programs and services. Enterprise-wide shared technology and data services will help increase the Department's capacity to make data-driven policy decisions, track progress, and support evidence-building within USDA's research and statistical agencies, while also increasing data shared with external researchers. Increasing shared services and modernizing legacy IT systems will move the Department towards a future where customer-facing programs are seamlessly integrated with back-end IT that can be continually modified in response to changing customer needs.

USDA is making better use of data and enabling advanced analytics, such as geospatial modeling, to improve the delivery of services and programs. The Department's enterprise data and analytics platform is bringing data together from across different parts of the organization to support cross-cutting analytics. The capabilities of data scientists and analysts have been expanded with the development of a data science workbench, which enables advanced analytics needed for more sophisticated insights.

Cybersecurity is a foundational shared service and represents a core component of improving digital service delivery and internal systems by ensuring secure, reliable access to USDA products and services.

Implementation Strategies

USDA will achieve this objective through the following implementation strategies, with an emphasis on building evidence to inform decision-making:

- Initiate creation of a centralized USDA Research/Researcher tool to improve customer experience

and increase access to information about the Department's research efforts.

- Launch four pilot programs in support of [Executive Order No. 14058](#) to digitize service delivery to the American public from end to end using customer experience best practices.
- Invest in the modernization of the IT workforce to support a customer-center, data-driven environment.
- Streamline program policies and modernize application systems reduce barriers, increase access, and improve the customer experience. More information on this implementation strategy can be found in the USDA Equity Action Plan.
- Continue the adoption of the USDA enterprise cloud platform by NASS, NRCS, and the Risk Management Agency and other Agencies to enable greater access to data for collaboration, enhanced analytics and reporting capabilities, and new data sharing capabilities with external stakeholders and researchers.
- Deliver data analytics, dashboards, and other data visualizations to support data-driven decision-making for Department-wide priorities such as climate, Justice40, and equity to present integrated views into USDA programs and services supporting these executive priorities.
- Create a centralized hub for geospatial data and applications at USDA to allow customers to integrate remote sensing, survey, trade, fire management, forestry, emergency response, climate change, underserved communities, and other data and applications.
- Advance initiatives to harmonize the deployment of Unmanned Aerial Systems to support emergency response, smart agriculture, and employee safety, while ensuring the cybersecurity of the supporting technologies.
- Develop initiatives to optimize geospatial data pipelines to put big data and advanced analytics at the reach of USDA customers so they can easily leverage geospatial data products from the new generation of earth observing satellites and other remote sensing devices.

- Implement a modern USDA enterprise communications network that consolidates 17 fragmented, disparate Agency networks into a higher-performing, modern, and more secure enterprise network that enables increased data sharing, improved USDA customer service, and a combined savings and cost avoidance more than \$500 million over the next 11 years.
- Continue to partner with USDA Mission Areas and industry to embrace shared cloud services, reflecting best practices for increased data sharing and customer experience.
- Continue to pursue automation via the Robotics Process Automation and internal systems and tools development and enhancement to simultaneously reduce cost associated with repetitive or administrative activities or reduce cycle times, thus improving customer experience.
- Strengthen the USDA cybersecurity posture through continuous process improvement, policy revision, and the implementation of modern enterprise cyber technologies.
- Improve how we collect, analyze, and measure cybersecurity data by centralizing security information and event management, while also improving reporting of cybersecurity data.
- Optimize the real-time visibility of vulnerabilities for improved detection and incident response using end point management tools.
- Integrate firewall and network security capabilities across USDA Mission Areas, with the goal of achieving \$2.4 million in cost savings.
- Continue collaboration between the Client Experience Center and Office of Customer Experience to better understand the customer journey and begin the development of a Customer Relationship Management capability.
- Implement common shared services and innovative solutions to increase agility and Service Level Agreements with Mission Areas. These include: the Enterprise Depot, which delivers customer-centric capabilities to keep people productive regardless of where they work; and Managed Print Services, which delivers an enormous economy of scale for printing.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AMS	Agricultural Marketing Service
ARS	Agricultural Research Service
APHIS	Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
CACFP	Child and Adult Care Food Program
CAP	Corrective Action Plans
CRP	Conservation Reserve Program
DEIA	Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility
E&T	SNAP Education and Training
EAWG	Evidence Act Working Group
ERS	Economic Research Service
Evidence Act	Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018
FAS	Foreign Agriculture Service
FDCH	Family Day Care Homes
FDPIR	Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations
FLP	Farm Loan Program
FNCS	Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services
FNS	Food and Nutrition Service
FPAC	Farm Production and Conservation
FSA	Farm Service Agency
FSIS	Food Safety and Inspection Service
FY	Fiscal year
GAO	Government Accountability Office
HHS	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
LEP	Limited English Proficiency
NASS	National Agricultural Statistics Service
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
OBPA	Office of Budget and Program Analysis
OCE	Office of the Chief Economist
OCS	Office of the Chief Scientist
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
R&D	Research and development
RPIC	Rural Placemaking Innovation Challenge
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
SY	School year
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
WIC	Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

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